Minutes Montana State Parks & Recreation Board

Kalispell October 17, 2013

Present: Tom Towe, Chair; Diane Conradi; Jeff Welch; Mary Sexton; Doug Smith; Mike Volesky, Acting Director MFWP and Board Secretary; Chas Van Genderen, MFWP; Roger Semler, MFWP; Tom Reilly, MFWP

Tom Towe, Chair, opened the meeting followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of August Meeting Minutes

Without objection, the Board dispensed with the reading of the August meeting minutes.

Motion: By: Mary Sexton - To approve the minutes of the August 28, 2013

meeting of the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board.

Second: Jeff Welch.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of August Expenses

Motion: By: Doug Smith - To approve the August Expenses as presented.

Second: Diane Conradi.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Board Member Reports – tours, conversations, questions, etc

Mary Sexton reported on a conversation with Matt Marcinek in Great Falls about bear efforts on the Smith River that are going forward and the easement that was discussed at the last meeting.

Jeff Welch noted he would be visiting the Three Forks area State Parks.

Chairman Tom Towe indicated he visited quite a few parks before the last meeting, but was busy since. We will continue to visit as many parks as we can.

Director/Staff Report

Chas Van Genderen, MFWP, advised visitation was up five percent year-to-date. Last year revenues were up 22 percent but this year were largely flat. We are trying to analyze this information. Field reports indicated that sites were full, and it was a very busy summer. There was no consistent correlation between visitation and revenue. Most revenue is from camping, not day use. Chas indicated the \$6 optional light vehicle registration is the primary source of revenue in the park system. The number of opt outs across the state vary greatly. County Treasurers are

an important influence on how the concept is embraced. Field staff visits and attendance at County Treasurers Annual Meeting are utilized. It is challenging in some areas to find support. In area where there are no state parks, people do not understand the value they offer our state.

Chairman Towe asked about a historical comparison. Mr. Van Genderen said that is a pretty steady percentage of opt outs even after the raise from \$4 to \$6. Challenges included the permanent opt out and unwillingness in some counties to collect the fee. Jeff Welch asked about the input of the County Treasurers as to whether or not they informed people of opting out. Chas responded that this varied from county to county. Some of the reasons we hear for opting out is because people do not like they way we (Parks) handle wolves or bison so they state they will not give us any more money. They don't realize we are not part of that decision nor do we get license money. Doug Smith inquired whether this was on personal vehicles or commercial vehicles. It is on light vehicles under 8,000 pounds. Chairman Towe commented on the importance of keeping our visitors happy in order to keep our revenues up. Mr. Van Genderen reported a survey showed most vehicles in state parks were paying fees on the honor system.

Mr. Van Genderen reported on a busy summer. We are sharing our quarterly or biweekly incident reports with the Board. We had a busy fire season with a number of wildfires in parks including at Rosebud Battlefield. We were a help station at Travelers' Rest, which interrupted parks operations for some time. There was also the significant flash flood at Bannack. Bannack reopened in seven weeks, and he acknowledged the remarkable work done by staff and Risk Management and Tort Defense Division of the Department of Administration. It was a heroic effort and they deserve recognition.

The Smith River is a unique responsibility of this Board that garners an enormous amount of attention by the public. This summer five bears were dispatched this year as they were food conditioned and too close to visitors. An analysis is being undertaken to see what changes need to be made regarding communication, emergency response, food storage and waste disposal just to mention a few of the topics. Roger Semler is leading this process.

The Park Warden Program will be reabsorbed into the Enforcement Division of the Department. There are three FTE that will transfer over. Roger Semler is working closely with that Division to make sure the needs of Parks are covered and the transition is smooth. The Director has made the commitment that Parks will receive the attention from enforcement they need.

The Engineering and Capital Development Program for Parks will be redirected under the Design and Construction Bureau. This is the traditional way which we moved away from in order to meet our needs and set our priorities. Those FTE will be transferred also.

How Parks works within the agency will be determined based on recommendations to be made in January. Mary Sexton suggested that the Director consider how the two DNRC FTEs working under FWP on State Trust Lands might be cross-trained and integrated into the discussion on enforcement in Parks. Diane Conradi commented she wanted to make sure that law enforcement

needs were tailored to the kind of uses that are occurring in high use recreation areas. Chairman Towe expressed concern and requested that the Board receive updates on decisions made and how things are working regarding enforcement in Parks.

The final issue is that of branding. A committee will be discussing branding for Fish and Wildlife vs. Parks needs.

Proposed Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Maren Murphy presented the draft SCORP entitled *Creating a Vibrant Future for Montana's Outdoor Recreation Heritage*. The SCORP provides funding priorities for the LWCF grant program. In addition, the SCORP sets priorities for guiding recreation management in Montana. State Parks staff recommended the Board authorize the Parks Division to solicit public comment on a proposed Draft SCORP for review and final consideration at the December 2013 Board meeting. This maintains Montana's eligibility to receive federal funding for community recreation grants. The deadline to submit the final plan to the National Park Service for their approval is December 31, 2013. Various state agencies participated in an advisory committee regarding the plan. This plan is available on the web for public review.

Diane Conradi asked how this document will be used practically on the ground by those involved in recreation management. Ms. Murphy said it is a statewide plan that talks about the need for trails, stronger connections between communities and public lands, the connection between public health and recreation and the benefit of the LWCF funding. Maren sees SCORP as a value for planning processes around the state. Mr. Van Genderen said this is the framework to set the stage for greater collaboration and communication and use in strategic planning. Mike Volesky asked Mr. Van Genderen to brief the Board on LWCF. Jeff Welch stated that the primary purpose of SCORP is to receive LWCF funding Mary Sexton remarked that she see it as something that could be more far reaching that just LWCF funding. Referring to statistics of the number of hunting licenses sold in Montana had gone down 15% since 2000. Fishing is up about 4%, and visitation is up 25% in state parks in the same time period. That alone tells us we need to pay attention not only for Parks, but also for partners like counties and cities. We need to recognize that recreation is taking a higher level role. The data is more valuable because the LWCF funding is reduced.

Mr. Van Genderen provided background on the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act passed in 1965. The revenue stream is from oil drilling and mineral development revenues. In 1976 the law was changed to say not less than 40 percent of the money goes to the federal side. Over the last four years the state share has gone down to 11% of the total program. States and communities are struggling to renovate and replace worn out structures. The rest of the funding goes towards the federal side of land and water which goes to buying important properties across the state, whether in the Rocky Mountain Front or other conservation land properties and to programs on Forest Legacy. This law is up for reauthorization in 2013. Traditionally SCORP has been focused on just maintaining eligibility for state funding, but there are new federal efforts to bring about better coordinated services and Montana is following that model. We attempted with this plan to break down the walls and make it relevant to all recreation. People don't know and

don't care what sites are federal, state, county or city. They only want to use and enjoy the recreation sites. We are in it

Motion: By: Mary Sexton – Moved that Montana State Parks initiate public

comment for the proposed Draft 2014-2018 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for 30 days starting from October 18 to November 18, and present the final plan at the December 2013 Board

meeting.

Second: Jeff Welch.

Public Comment on SCORP

Jennifer Young, Recreation Superintendent, City of Kalispell testified in favor of the SCORP.

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

Jennifer Young, City Parks and Recreation, stated she is on the Board of the Montana Trails, Recreation and Park Association (MTRPA), which just had its annual meeting in September in Idaho. She stressed the importance of trails and invited those interested in the parks and recreation field to be part of the Association. The conference for MTRPA is in Butte next year, and will not be a joint conference. She was part of the Alliance for Biking and Walking campaigns, Bike Walk Montana, and she favored finding an alternative source for trails. Suggestions were a tourist tax or penny gas tax. MTRPA will hold a mid-year meeting in Helena and she hoped it could be coordinated with the Parks and Recreation Board meeting so that there could be a social event together.

Bob Watson, Whitefish, stated he served on the Montana Heritage Commission, which manages the state assets in Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley and share some of the same funding sources as the Board. He also serves on the Region I Citizen's Advisory Council. He welcomed the Board to Kalispell and hoped to increase collaboration.

Lex Blood, Kalispell, commented his involvement was with conservation education and recreation. He had been involved with the Glacier Institute, and Flathead Community of Resource Educators, all collaborative processes. He favored further collaborations, and thanked the staff.

Michael Jamison, National Parks Conservation Association. He congratulated the Board on their appointments, and thought the Board would be of great importance. NPCA's mission was to protect and enhance national parks for current and future generations. They work with the

American Great Outdoors Program, park funding, and Youth in Nature. He stressed the importance of access to the outdoors and the economic impact. Investment is needed in trails, snowmobile and cross country ski grooming, infrastructure, trailhead infrastructure, and also requires a commitment to maintaining and increasing access to water. He presented a report called *Pathways to Prosperity*. When asked by Chairman Towe about the role of state parks in the next 20 years, Mr. Jamison replied they are an easy and welcoming gateway for people to find the outdoors. He favored programs for kids.

Fred Jones, Whitefish Legacy Partners, stated their group speared the development of the Whitefish Trail and worked with DNRC on permanent easements on some of the school trust lands around Whitefish. They are developing recreational facilities and making improvements and looking to partner with FWP or an organization that understands long term management. The area has seen a lot of use not only from locals but from Canadians and tourists.

Dylan Boyle, Continent Geo-Tourism Council, explained the council is a destination stewardship organization based in the Flathead that provides opportunities for visitors and residents to experience the region and to contribute to regional wellbeing. Their goal is for a high quality authentic travel experience and a sustainable tourism experience. He provided map guides to the Board. He thought they could provide better exposure for state parks on the map and on their website. They also work with groups like the National Parks Conversation Association and Crown of the Continent. Dylan will work with Jennifer on updating content on the Geo-Tourism website. Tim O'Connell is Dylan's counterpart in Yellowstone.

Clifford Kipp, Regional Supervisor, Montana Conservation Corp runs crews of young adults and youth throughout the northwest part of the state and work closely with FWP. He also represented Foys to Blacktail Trails, a trail and open space organization focused primarily on Herron Park. He offered MCC as a resource. He encouraged the Board to check out the Foys to Blacktail Trails project. He was personally interested in how to better manage recreational and DNRC lands. Diane Conradi expressed appreciation for his work.

Break

Proposed Commercial Use Permit Fee Rule

Roger Semler, Assistant Administrator and Chief of Operations for the Parks Division, indicated the fee rule was historically approved by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and now we are seeking to establish a commercial use fee rule through the State Parks & Recreation Board. The authority for administering commercial use is established in administrative rule 12.14.101-170. The rule was adopted by the FWP Commission in 2009. Roger gave a definition of the Commercial Use and gave examples. State Parks staff recommended the Board authorize the Parks Division to solicit public comment on a proposed Commercial Use Permit Fee Rule for review and final consideration at the December 2013 Board meeting. The fees will be the same as in 2009. The biennial rule approved by the FWP Commission will expire in December, 2013. The Parks Division has an interest in updating or amending the administrative rule regarding the

fishing access site permit and the singular, solo photographer requirement. Mr. Semler explained his interest in simplifying the fee rule.

Motion: By: Jeff Welch - That the Board approve the Parks Division to seek public

comment for the proposed Commercial Use Permit Fee Rule for review at

the December 2013 Board meeting.

Second: Doug Smith

Discussion: Jeff encouraged staff to change fees more over time. Some fees seemed really low, such as those for motion pictures. It will cost you more than \$400/day to bring in a film crew for the day. Diane encouraged thinking about state parks needs when drafting new rules and proposed fees that are going to address the unique needs in state parks with more concentrated use.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Final Snowmobile Grants Concurrence

Tom Reilly, Assistant Administrator, stated that during the 30-day public comment period, three comments were received on the proposed snowmobile grants. All of the comments were supportive of the program and/or an individual snowmobile club. Staff recommended awarding the \$390,000 in grooming funds as proposed for the 2013/2014 grooming season. There are 27 snowmobile clubs throughout Montana, mostly in the western and northwestern parts of the state.

Motion: By: Jeff Welch - That the Board concur with the agency decision to award

the \$390,000 in grooming funds to Montana's 27 recognized Snowmobile

Clubs for the upcoming 2013/2014 snowmobile season.

Second: Mary Sexton.

<u>Public Comment</u>: Robbie Holman, Grooming Chair, Flathead Snowmobile Association explained the funds are used for equipment and two paid groomer positions. The Association received \$19,000 of the grooming funds, and their budget is around \$50,000 a year, which they get from RTP grants and local donations.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

OHV Grants (Tom Reilly)

The application period for OHV grants closed August 2nd with 18 applications received. Eleven applications were recommended for funding. Five were for trail steward positions, two were education ethics type projects, and three were on the ground trail improvement efforts. One was an update of the OHV field use study done every five years by U of M School of Business. The recommendation was to proceed with the public comment process for the proposed award of the 11 OHV grants as scored and discussed with the citizen's OHVAC members.

Motion: By: Jeff Welch- To have the Parks Division proceed with the public

comment process for the 11 proposed OHV grants. Final Board concurrence will occur following the public comment process.

Second: Diane Conradi.

Public Comment: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Major Maintenance Project List (Tom Reilly)

Each year money is set aside from our HB 5 annual appropriation for Parks Major Maintenance projects statewide. A total of \$410,000 in potential projects was proposed. The funding set-aside for this year was approximately \$240,000. Major Maintenance projects are projects that are larger than what the regional budgets can handle, but smaller than the Capital Projects (projects \$75,000 and over—projects require hiring a consultant). Mr. Reilly gave examples of these types of project (also listed in the background information provided). It was recommended that the Board concur with the proposed decisions for the current cycle of Parks Major Maintenance projects. The funding allocations were estimates at this point, with adjustments (+/-) to be made as the projects proceed.

Motion: By: Diane Conradi - To concur with the Parks Division's decisions to

proceed with the proposed (18) Parks Major Maintenance projects for the

2013/2014 cycle. Second: Mary Sexton.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Capital Program/Budget - Informational (Tom Reilly) 2:45

At the December meeting the board will discuss proposed capital projects in preparation for the next legislative session. Mr. Reilly distributed a list of Capital Program needs statewide totaling \$44 million. These projects range from land acquisitions, to maintenance needs, to visitor centers. In preparation for the next session, at the December meeting we will have a list of proposed General Fund projects to advance as well as top projects for the anticipated funding we are going to have available of our funds for Capital Projects. At the last meeting, the board received a presentation outlining the division's approximately \$4.3 million allocated in HB 5 to the capital program from the last legislature. The Board will help decide priorities for the parks system in terms of its capital request. Chas Van Genderen explained some of the challenges with historic properties and funding issues throughout the park system. Of the \$4.3 million in the Capital Program, \$1 million is for roads, \$1.5 million is Dingle-Johnson and can only be used at water-based parks. There are some hard decisions to be made on how to spend the remainder of the money and how can we meet some of the remaining needs. Jeff Welch commented on the importance of investing in tangible upgrades for the visitor, the thing people can buy into and say Parks is doing a good job. Diane Conradi mentioned opportunities for philanthropy or

investment by the public. Mary Sexton stated getting new general fund is next to impossible but favored looking for other revenue sources like the coal tax trust fund. Chairman Towe saw the creation of this board as a vehicle for obtaining further funding from the legislature. HB 5 money is based on the fund balances in the parks accounts and not general fund. Chairman Towe favors a new funding source such as a change in the oil tax holiday. Doug Smith thought the source of funding will affect the priority. Chas Van Genderen added that revenue generated from the water-based sites help fund places like Bannack that don't make much revenue and don't have funding sources. He will bring the list of funding sources and how they can be used to the next meeting. Chairman Towe mentioned the example of the Rosebud Battlefield Visitor Center with no funding source.

Draft Policy on Capital and Major Maintenance (Chas Van Genderen)

In the law it states that all capital projects with an estimated cost of more than \$5,000 are subject to this board's approval. The agency urged the board to consider, discuss, amend and adopt the draft policy. Chas Van Genderen proposed that some board members work with him to finalize the policy for adoption at the next scheduled meeting. The board agreed this should be put on the agenda for the next meeting with public comment at that time.

Introductions were made of park staff.

The next meeting will be held December 18, 2013.

Adjourn/Lunch 1:13:04